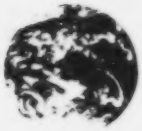
The United Nations at 50: Recognizing the Achievements



UN50

1945—1995

الذكرى السنوية الخمسون
لإنشاء الأمم المتحدة

联合国五十周年纪念

Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations

Cinquantième Anniversaire de l'Organisation des Nations Unies

Пятидесятая годовщина
Организации
Объединенных Наций

Cincuentenario de las Naciones Unidas

THE UNITED NATIONS was established in the aftermath of a devastating war to help stabilize international relations and give peace a more secure foundation.

Amid the threat of nuclear war and seemingly endless regional conflicts, peace-keeping has become an overriding concern of the United Nations. In the process, the activities of blue-helmeted peace-keepers have emerged as the most visible role associated with the world organization.

The United Nations, however, is much more than a peacekeeper and forum for conflict resolution. Often without attracting attention, the United Nations and its family of agencies are engaged in a vast array of work that touches every aspect of people's lives around the world.

Child survival and development. Environmental protection. Human rights. Health and medical research. Alleviation of poverty and economic development. Agricultural development and fisheries. Education. Family planning. Emergency and disaster relief. Air and sea travel. Peaceful uses of atomic energy. Labour and workers' rights. The list goes on.

Here, in brief, is a sampling of what the United Nations organizations have accomplished since 1945 when the world organization was founded.

1. **Maintaining peace and security** – By deploying more than 35 peace-keeping forces and observer missions, the United Nations has been able to restore calm to allow the negotiating process to go forward while saving millions of people from becoming casualties of conflicts. There are presently 16 active peace-keeping forces in operation.

2. **Making peace** – Since 1945, the United Nations has been credited with negotiating 172 peaceful settlements that have ended regional conflicts. Recent cases include an end to the Iran-Iraq war, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan, and an end to the civil war in El Salvador. The United Nations has used quiet diplomacy to avert imminent wars.

3. **Promoting democracy** – The United Nations has enabled people in over 45 countries to participate in free and fair elections, including those held in Cambodia, Namibia, El Salvador, Eritrea, Mozambique, Nicaragua and South Africa. It has provided electoral advice, assistance, and monitoring of results.

4. **Promoting development** – The UN system has devoted more attention and resources to the promotion of the development of human skills and potentials than any other external assistance effort. The system's annual disbursements, including loans and grants, amount to more than $10 billion. The UN Development Programme (UNDP), in close cooperation with over 170 Member States and other UN agencies, designs and implements projects for agriculture, industry, education, and the environment. It supports more than 5,000 projects with a budget of $1.3 billion. It is the largest multilateral source of grant development assistance. The World Bank, at the forefront in mobilizing

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support for developing countries worldwide, has alone loaned $333 billion for development projects since 1946. In addition, UNICEF spends more than $800 million a year, primarily on immunization, health care, nutrition and basic education in 138 countries.

5. **Promoting human rights** – Since adopting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, the United Nations has helped enact dozens of comprehensive agreements on political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights. By investigating individual complaints of human rights abuses, the UN Human Rights Commission has focused world attention on cases of torture, disappearance, and arbitrary detention and has generated international pressure to be brought on governments to improve their human rights records.

6. **Protecting the environment** – The United Nations has played a vital role in fashioning a global programme designed to protect the environment. The "Earth Summit," the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, resulted in treaties on bio-diversity and climate change, and all countries adopted "Agenda 21" — a blueprint to promote sustainable development or the concept of economic growth while protecting natural resources.

7. **Preventing nuclear proliferation** – The United Nations, through the International Atomic Energy Agency, has helped minimize the threat of a nuclear war by inspecting nuclear reactors in 90 countries to ensure that nuclear materials are not diverted for military purposes.

8. **Promoting self determination and independence** – The United Nations has played a role in bringing about independence in countries that are now among its Member States.

9. **Strengthening international law** – Over 300 international treaties, on topics as varied as human rights conventions to agreements on the use of outer space and seabed, have been enacted through the efforts of the United Nations.

10. **Handing down judicial settlements of major international disputes** – By giving judgments and advisory opinions, the International Court of Justice has helped settle international disputes involving territorial issues, non-interference in the internal affairs of states, diplomatic relations, hostage-taking, the right of asylum, rights of passage and economic rights.

11. **Ending apartheid in South Africa** – By imposing measures ranging from an arms embargo to a convention against segregated sporting events, the United Nations was a major factor in bringing about the downfall of the apartheid system, which the General Assembly called "a crime against humanity." Elections were held in April 1994 in which all South Africans were allowed to participate on an equal basis, followed by the establishment of a majority government.

12. **Providing humanitarian aid to victims of conflict** – More than 30 million refugees fleeing war, famine or persecution have received aid from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees since 1951 in a continuing effort coordinated by the United Nations that often involves other agencies. There are more than 19 million refugees, mostly women and children, who are receiving food, shelter, medical aid, education and repatriation assistance.

13. **Aiding Palestinian refugees** – Since 1950, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) has sustained four generations of Palestinians with free schooling, essential health care, relief assistance and key social services virtually without interruption. There are 2.9 million refugees in the Middle East served by UNRWA.

14. **Alleviating chronic hunger and rural poverty in developing countries** – The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has developed a system of providing credit, often in very small amounts, for the poorest and most marginalised groups that has benefited over 230 million people in nearly 100 developing countries.

15. **Focusing on African development** – For the United Nations, Africa continues to be the highest priority. In 1986, the United Nations convened a special session to drum up international support for African economic recovery and development. The United Nations also has instituted a system-wide task force to ensure that commitments made by the international community are honoured and challenges met. The Africa Project Development Facility has helped entrepreneurs in 25 countries to find financing for new enterprises. The Facility has completed 130 projects which represent investments of $233 million and the creation of 13,000 new jobs. It is expected that these new enterprises will either earn or save some $131 million in foreign exchange annually.

16. **Promoting women's rights** – A long term objective of the United Nations has been to improve the lives of women and to empower women to have greater control over their lives. Several conferences during the UN-sponsored International Women's Decade set an agenda for the advancement of women and women's rights for the rest of the century. The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) have supported programmes and projects to improve the quality of life for women in over 100 countries. They include credit and training, access to new food-production technologies and marketing opportunities, and other means of promoting women's work.

17. **Providing safe drinking water** – UN agencies have worked to make safe drinking water available to 1.3 billion people in rural areas during the last decade.

18. **Eradicating smallpox** – A 13-year effort by the World Health Organization resulted in the complete eradication of smallpox from the planet in 1980. The eradication has saved an estimated $1 billion a year in vaccination and monitoring, almost three times the cost of eliminating the scourge itself. WHO also helped wipe out polio from the Western hemisphere, with global eradication expected by the year 2000.

19. **Pressing for universal immunization** – Polio, tetanus, measles, whooping cough, diphtheria and tuberculosis still kill more than eight million children each year. In 1974, only 5 per cent of children in developing countries were immunized against these diseases. Today, as a result of the efforts of UNICEF and WHO, there is an 80 percent immunization rate, saving the lives of more than 3 million children each year.

20. **Reducing child mortality rates** – Through oral rehydration therapy, water and sanitation and other health and nutrition measures undertaken by UN agencies, child mortality rates in the developing countries have been halved since 1960, increasing the average life expectancy from 37 to 67 years.

21. **Fighting parasitic diseases** – Efforts by UN agencies in North Africa to eliminate the dreaded screw worm, a parasite that feeds on human and animal flesh, prevented the spread of the parasite, which is carried by flies, to Egypt, Tunisia, sub-Saharan Africa and Europe. A WHO programme also has saved the lives of 7 million children from going blind from the river blindness and rescued many others from guinea worm and other tropical diseases.

22. **Promoting investment in developing countries** – The United Nations, through the efforts of the UN Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), has served as a "match-maker" for North-South, South-South and East-West investment, promoting entrepreneurship and self-reliance, industrial cooperation and technology transfer and cost-effective, ecologically-sensitive industry.

23. **Orienting economic policy toward social need** – Many UN agencies have emphasized the need to take account of human needs in determining economic adjustment and restructuring policies and programmes, including measures to safeguard the poor, especially in areas of health and education, and "debt swaps for children."

24. **Reducing the effects of natural disasters** – The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) has spared millions of people from the calamitous effects of both natural and man-made disasters. Its

early warning system, which utilizes thousands of surface monitors as well as satellites, has provided information for the dispersal of oil spills and has predicted long-term droughts. The system has allowed for the efficient distribution of food aid to drought regions, such as southern Africa in 1992.

25. **Providing food to victims of emergencies** – Over two million tons of food are distributed each year by the World Food Programme (WFP). Nearly 30 million people facing acute food shortages in 36 countries benefited from this assistance in 1994.

26. **Clearing land mines** – The United Nations is leading an international effort to clear land mines from former battlefields in Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia, El Salvador, Mozambique, Rwanda and Somalia that still kill and maim thousands of innocent people every year.

27. **Protecting the ozone layer** – The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) have been instrumental in highlighting the damage caused to the earth's ozone layer. As a result of a treaty, known as the Montreal Protocol, there has been a global effort to reduce chemical emissions of substances that have caused the depletion of the ozone layer. The effort will spare millions of people from the increased risk of contracting cancer due to additional exposure to ultraviolet radiation.

28. **Curbing global warming** – Through the Global Environment Facility, countries have contributed substantial resources to curb conditions that cause global warming. Increasing emissions from burning fossil fuels and changes in land use patterns have led to a build-up of gases in the atmosphere, which experts believe can lead to a warming of the Earth's temperature.

29. **Preventing over-fishing** – The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) monitors marine fishery production and issues alerts to prevent damage due to over-fishing.

30. **Limiting deforestation and promoting sustainable forestry development** – FAO, UNDP and the World Bank, through a Tropical Forests Action Programme, have formulated and carried out forestry actions plans in 90 countries.

31. **Cleaning up pollution** – UNEP led a major effort to clean up the Mediterranean Sea. It encouraged adversaries such as Syria and Israel, and Turkey and Greece to work together to clean up beaches. As a result, more than 50 percent of the previously polluted beaches are now usable.

32. **Protecting consumers' health** – To ensure the safety of food sold in the market place, UN agencies have established standards for over 200 food commodities and safety limits for more than 3,000 food contaminants.

33. **Reducing fertility rates** – The UN Population Fund (UNFPA), through its family planning programmes, has enabled people to make informed choices, and consequently given families, and especially women, greater control over their lives. As a result, women in developing countries are having fewer children—from six births per woman in the 1960s to 3.5 today. In the 1960s, only 10 percent of the world's families were using effective methods of family planning. The number now stands at 55 percent.

34. **Fighting drug abuse** – The UN International Drugs Control Programme (UNDCP) has worked to reduce demand for illicit drugs, suppress drug trafficking, and has helped farmers to reduce their economic reliance on growing narcotic crops by shifting farm production toward other dependable sources of income.

35. **Improving global trade relations** – The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has worked to obtain special trade preferences for developing countries to export their products to developed countries. It has also negotiated international commodities agreements to ensure fair prices for developing countries. And through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which has now been supplanted by the world Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations has

supported trade liberalization, that will increase economic development opportunities in developing countries.

36. **Promoting economic reform** – Together with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations has helped many countries improve their economic management, offered training for government finance officials, and provided financial assistance to countries experiencing temporary balance of payment difficulties.

37. **Promoting worker rights** – The International Labour Organization (ILO) has worked to guarantee freedom of the right to association, the right to organize, collective bargaining, the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples, promote employment and equal remuneration and has sought to eliminate discrimination and child labour. And by setting safety standards, ILO has helped reduce the toll of work-related accidents.

38. **Introducing improved agricultural techniques and reducing costs** – With assistance from the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) that has resulted in improved crop yields, Asian rice farmers have saved $12 million on pesticides and governments over $150 million a year in pesticide subsidies.

39. **Promoting stability and order in the world's oceans** – Through three international conferences, the third lasting more than nine years, the United Nations has spearheaded an international effort to promote a comprehensive global agreement for the protection, preservation and peaceful development of the oceans. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which came into force in 1994, lays down rules for the determination of national maritime jurisdiction, navigation on the high seas, rights and duties of coastal and other states, obligation to protect and preserve the marine environment, cooperation in the conduct of marine scientific research and preservation of living resources.

40. **Improving air and sea travel** – UN agencies have been responsible for setting safety standards for sea and air travel. The efforts of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) have contributed to making air travel the safest mode of transportation. To wit: In 1947, when nine million travelled, 590 were killed in aircraft accidents; in 1993 the number of deaths was 936 out of the 1.2 billion airline passengers. Over the last two decades, pollution from tankers has been reduced by as much as 60 percent thanks to the work of the International Maritime Organization (IMO).

41. **Protecting intellectual property** – The World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) provides protection for new inventions and maintains a register of nearly 3 million national trademarks. Through treaties, it also protects the works of artists, composers and authors worldwide. WIPO's work makes it easier and less costly for individuals and enterprises to enforce their property rights. It also broadens the opportunity to distribute new ideas and products without relinquishing control over the property rights.

42. **Promoting the free flow of information** – To allow all people to obtain information that is free of censorship and culturally unbiased, UNESCO has provided aid to develop and strengthen communication systems, established news agencies and supported an independent press.

43. **Improving global communications** – The Universal Postal Union (UPU) has maintained and regulated international mail delivery. The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) has coordinated use of the radio spectrum, promoted cooperation in assigning positions for stationary satellites, and established international standards for communications, thereby ensuring the unfettered flow of information around the globe.

44. **Empowering the voiceless** – UN-sponsored international years and conferences have caused governments to recognize the needs and contributions of groups usually excluded fromdecision-making, such as the aging, children, youth, homeless, indigenous and disabled people.

45. **Establishing "children as a zone of peace"** – From El Salvador to Lebanon, Sudan to former Yugoslavia, UNICEF pioneered the establishment of "Days of Tranquility" and the opening of "Corridors of Peace" to provide vaccines and other assistance desperately needed by children caught in armed conflict.

46. **Generating worldwide commitment in support of the needs of children** – Through UNICEF's efforts, the Convention on the Rights of the Child entered into force as international law in 1990 and has become law in 166 countries by the end of September 1994; following the 1990 World Summit for Children convened by UNICEF, more than 150 governments have committed to reaching over 20 specific measurable goals to radically improve children's lives by the year 2000.

47. **Improving education in developing countries** – As a direct result of the efforts of UN AGENCIES, over 60% of adults in developing countries can now read and write, and 80 percent of children in these countries attend school.

48. **Improving literacy for women** – Programmes aimed at promoting education and advancement for women helped raise the female literacy rate in developing countries from 36 percent in 1970 to 56 percent in 1990.

49. **Safeguarding and preserving historic cultural and architectural sites** – Ancient monuments in 81 countries including Greece, Egypt, Italy, Indonesia and Cambodia, have been protected through the efforts of UNESCO, and international conventions have been adopted to preserve cultural property.

50. **Facilitating academic and cultural exchanges** – The United Nations, through UNESCO and the United Nations University (UNU), have encouraged scholarly and scientific co-operation, networking of institutions and promotion of cultural expressions, including those of minorities and indigenous people.

The United Nations at 50: Recognizing the Achievements — *The Nobel Peace Prize*

The Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded five times to the United Nations and its organizations

1954 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, for its assistance to European refugees

1965 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), for its work in helping save the lives of the world's children

1969 International Labour Organisation (ILO), Geneva, for its progress in establishing workers' rights and protections

1981 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, for its assistance to Asian refugees

1988 United Nations Peace-keeping Forces, for its peace-keeping operations

The Nobel Peace Prize was also awarded to:

1945 Cordell Hull, U.S., ex-Secretary of State, for his leadership in establishing the UN

1949 Lord John Boyd Orr, United Kingdom, first Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

1950 Ralph Bunche, U.S., UN Mediator in Palestine (1948), for his leadership in the armistice agreements signed in 1949 by Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria

1957 Lester Pearson, Canada, ex-Secretary of State, President 7th Session of the UN General Assembly, for a lifetime of work for peace and for leading UN efforts to resolve the Suez Canal crisis

1961 Dag Hammarskjöld, Sweden, Secretary-General of the UN, for his work in helping settle the Congo crisis

1974 Sean MacBride, Ireland, UN Commissioner for Namibia